

Public Workshops Notice

AFW Process Releases Draft Guidelines For Informal Public Review

The Agriculture, Fish and Water (AFW) Irrigation District process has released a draft guidelines document for irrigation districts on how to prepare comprehensive management plans. The management plans would focus on enhancing and protecting habitat for endangered fish and wildlife, while also addressing state water quality needs through a voluntary process. The document, entitled "Guidelines for Preparation of Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plans" takes a step-by-step guidance approach for water conservation and Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) planning for irrigation districts in Washington State.

The process described within the document encourages early cooperation between irrigation districts and agencies in order to assess district operations and to set a course for addressing any necessary changes. It explains the various pathways to ESA compliance and districts can choose a compliance pathway according to their needs. It does not infringe on farmers' rights to use water, instead it looks at improving delivery system efficiencies to benefit water users, while also benefiting aquatic habitat.

A dedicated workgroup spent over a year developing "Guidelines for Preparation of Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plans." The extensive collaboration during this manual's development has led to a better understanding by all participants of the varied values, legal requirements, constraints and needs associated with the ESA and CWA. Revised drafts of the document were shared with the Executive Committee throughout the process.

There are 97 irrigation districts in Washington serving water to over one million acres. This AFW process will most benefit smaller districts that lack the resources to hire additional staff or consultants to help them with ESA and CWA, but all districts could gain by the process. AFW provides the opportunity to create a voluntary process for irrigation districts to get coverage under a federal 4(d) rule for threatened/endangered species.

A major incentive to use the guidance document is a coordinated process with clear expectations on how the process will proceed and identifying funding for planning and implementation phases.

**Informal
Comment Period:
February 12-March 13**

**Public Workshops
3:00 and 7:00 pm at
each location:**

February 26, 2001
Labor & Industries Bldg.
Auditorium
7273 Linderson Way SE
Tumwater, WA 98501

February 28, 2001
Wenatchee Convention
Center, Rooms: Gala 3-4
201 N. Wenatchee Ave.
Wenatchee, WA 98801

March 1, 2001
Benton County PUD
Auditorium
2721 W. 10th Ave.
Kennewick, WA 99336

Send comments to:
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*The WA Conservation Commission
is an affirmative action and equal
opportunity agency.*

*For special accommodation needs,
call (360) 407-6209 or
(360) 407-6006 (TDD).*

Informal comment period

Beginning February 12, 2001, the draft document is out for a 30-day informal public comment period. We are looking for feedback and suggestions on how to improve the document. There are also three rounds of public workshops scheduled for Wenatchee, Tri-Cities and Olympia (see sidebar, page one). Additional meetings will be held as needed or requested.

Pilot projects

One of the next steps includes working on identifying irrigation districts willing to be involved in a pilot project using the guidance document. We are currently seeking funding to cover the costs associated with the pilot projects.

Background

The AFW process kicked off in December 1999 and contains two consecutive processes. Besides the Irrigation Districts' process, the other is an effort to update farm conservation practice standards found in the "Field Office Technical Guide" (FOTG), developed by the federal Natural Resources

Conservation Service. The FOTG process has been reviewing practices pertaining to ditch maintenance in Northwest Washington. The result will be a guidance document to help farmers identify what physical and biological habitat functions are present on any given stretch of stream, and then identifying and customizing what conservation practices are needed on a given farm to solve the habitat problems, through the development of a farm plan.

For more information on how to receive a copy

The draft guidelines document is available in three formats: a CD, a hard copy format, or by accessing the AFW website at: www.conserver.org/afw/files/CIDMP_Draft.pdf

To order a CD or hard copy, please contact Hibba Wahbeh, Washington Conservation Commission, PO Box 47721, Olympia, WA 98504-7721; phone: (360) 407-7219, TDD: (360) 407-6006, e-mail: hwah461@ecy.wa.gov

Send written comments to Paula Smith, address listed on page one.